For it is my Flesh

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For it is my Flesh

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Summary

Jimmy eats another part of Curly's leg. He's reminded of communion.

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: 【缄默祸运/Mouthwashing】【授翻】源因你的血肉 by SuliuSaltfish

Hunger pains wrack Jimmy’s body as he tries to fall asleep.

He lays on the uncomfortable medical mattress, basking in the red light emitting from the fractured error message. No sunny backdrops, no dusk sunsets- just pure, unrelenting red. His eyes were screwed tight, and he still saw red.

For hours he tosses and turns in a restless daze. His stomach hurts, his eyes hurt, his brain hurts, and his throat hurts. Every now and again, he’ll grab for one of the countless bottles of mouthwash littering the floor, and before long the ethanol is pouring down his esophagus with a fiery burn. He always hopes it'll warm his belly and make him all dumb and happy like what beer used to do, but no matter how much mouthwash he chugs, he just feels bitter inside.

His mind wanders to Swansea. Swansea, who had tried finding escape at the bottom of a bottle, but had only found wrath. It was the kind of wrath that he tried to turn away from by singing with a slurred edge to his words, dancing with a limp, and partaking in all of the usual pastimes of a lout. Eventually he faced the wrath, and it consumed him. That was when he had the ax. And then Jimmy shot him.

The gun was pressing against Jimmy's leg from under the covers, but he didn't dare adjust it. It gave him a sense of power, a sense of protection that he wanted as close to him as possible. There is nobody left him to defend himself from, but he still keeps the gun close.

Jimmy lets out a groan and opens his eyes. He accepts that tonight will be yet another sleepless night to add to his record aboard The Tulpar. His gaze ignores the other deserted mattresses and lands right on the dining table. The crew sits around it, bathed in the hazy red light.

Swansea stares at him with his bullet hole for an eye.

Anya stares at him with her eyes clouded over.

Daisuke stares at him with the gaping slash cleaving his face in two.

Jimmy turns on his side and faces the wall. He feels their dead stares burn holes through his back. His stomach growls.

Soon he's on his feet and lumbering towards the kitchen, vision swimming thanks to both the ethanol flowing through his veins and the blinding migraine that always seems to plague him nowadays. As

he grows closer, the stink of decay and rot hits him like a truck.

He doesn't bother checking the vending machines in the corner. They've long since bottomed out, and anything he could use to restock them is long gone under piles of foam. Most of the kitchen has suffered the same fate.

They're all slumped over in their chairs, party hats donning their disheveled hair. Old streamers surround them, and deflated balloons gather around their feet. It's just like Curly's birthday party, except this time, Curly's on the table.

He looks like he did on the medical gurney; still, useless, and bloody. He smells horrible, despite Jimmy's greatest efforts. Jimmy is the only one left. The only capable person aboard. He has to take the responsibility. Nobody else would. He is the only one who could. Take the responsibility, Jimmy. Give Curly his painkillers, Jimmy. Could you help me out with this, Jimmy? Captain Jimmy. Put down the gun, Captain. Change my bandages, Captain.

Curly stares at him with a single unblinking eye. Jimmy stares back. He looks sort of divine, laying across the table, bathed in red and surrounded by his faithful crew.

"You hungry?" Jimmy asks, his voice fried to hell and back.

Curly groans.

A while ago (hours, days, weeks?), Jimmy had cut off a chunk of Curly's leg. There was no food. What else was he supposed to do? Ever since then, Jimmy has been slowly eating piece after piece. Not nearly enough to have a full belly, but just barely enough to keep himself standing. Pony Express doesn't have any stoves. He has to eat it raw. He handles it.

Jimmy picks up an opened bottle of mouthwash, takes a bitter swig for good measure, and moves his hand to Curly's jaw. He pinches his chin between his index and thumb, and with a small tug, Curly's mouth lolls open. Jimmy tilts Curly's head up and holds the mouthwash up to where his lips used to be, pouring the minty fire down his throat like a mother feeding her child. Curly gags and almost chokes but he gets it down fine. "Come on, buddy. Don't make this any harder than it has to be," he mumbles.

Jimmy likes to imagine that the ethanol provides him some comfort, no matter how small. Maybe it distracts him from the pain. Maybe it

takes the edge off. Maybe it does jackshit. He has to try. He ignores how Curly attempts to flinch away and tells himself it's for his own good.

Jimmy sets his head along with the mouthwash back down on the table, and his mind goes silent as his gaze goes to Curly's legs. Curly's labored breath hitches.

It's little more than a stump now, ending below the knee. The skin is rubbed raw, and the dirty bandages are crusted with blood. The red from the screen blends in with the red from the gore. Jimmy thanks the fact that Pony Express sterilized their ships to the point of eradicating all insects. He doesn't think he could stomach maggot-filled meat.

Curly lets out a pained moan, and Jimmy snaps his head to face him.

"Oh I'm sorry, do you have a problem? Does the corpse have something to say?" he asks dryly.

Curly silently looks at him, and for a moment Jimmy feels the eye of God judging his actions. It's a feeling he hasn't had since he was a teenager.

He brushes it aside and snaps, "I don't have a choice here, Curly. What do you want me to do? What am I supposed to do? I'm just taking initiative here, I'm ensuring our survival, is that so wrong?"

Curly stares at him. There's a plea in that stare.

"Captain Curly, up on his high horse, up on the highest rung: judging all of us at the bottom of the ladder. What else should I expect from you?"

His one blue eye flits to the rest of the crew, sitting limp in their chairs.

"I can't do that, Curly, I can't eat them. They're too old, they're rotting. You're alive, though. You're perfect. You're our only hope, our saving grace, just like you've always been." A silence. "You're the cake."

Curly says nothing and Jimmy picks up the fire ax with a huff. "Besides, I'm helping you out here, why can't you see that? This is for your own good! Hell, if it weren't for me, you'd be dead. God, everything I do, I do for you people. I give and give and give, and what do you all do? You take and take and take."

He unwraps the bandages on Curly's leg. Curly squirms and the gauze keeps sticking to his skin, but Jimmy gets it done.

The wound underneath all of the bandages is warm to the touch- it looks horrific. It's not bleeding as much as it was earlier, but that doesn't mean that it isn't still spurting. Pus oozes out alongside the blood, festering along the wound's edges. It doesn't look safe to eat. It'll kill Curly if he leaves it alone.

Jimmy grows bold and makes the brave leadership decision to cut off Curly's kneecap, striking at the bottom of his thigh.

With every chop there is a disgusting squelch, and that's when Curly starts screaming. He shrieks like an animal and it hurts Jimmy's head. He can only take so much before he screams, "SHUT UP!" right back at him between his cuts. The ax is doused in mouthwash for sterility, and it feels so hefty yet so right in his hands.

He hacks again and again. Blood spurts out and splashes his uniform. The captain has to get his hands dirty every now and then. Jimmy and Curly grunt and scream together with every swing of the blade like some tortured choir.

The ax plunges into the flesh again and again until it suddenly hits oak. Blood pools out and floods the table in its wake. Curly's knee is gone. Jimmy simply tosses it to the side. It's an immense waste of food, but he cannot eat something that looks that infectious. Plus, with all of the bones and cartilage that make up a kneecap, he probably couldn't get a lot of good meat out of it anyways. It pained him, oh how the waste pained him, but he tosses it aside. He tosses it and it tumbles onto Anya's plate, landing in front of her vomit stained coveralls.

"I'm doing this for your own good," Jimmy mindlessly repeats, and starts unraveling more of the gauze on his leg.

Curly chokes out agonized sob after sob. His throat sounds awfully raw, even worse than Jimmy's.

After clearing the area, Jimmy repositions the ax once more and swings. His cuts are jagged and unmanageable. He chips the bone more and more with each impact, splintering it easily due to its atrophy. Curly starts screaming again, a horrible, grating noise. He writhes as much as his crippled body allows and makes Jimmy fuck up one of his chops. Jimmy freezes, and he would've seen red if the lounge wasn't already bathed in it.

He screams “Why do you people always have to make everything so damn DIFFICULT!?” as he brings the ax down once more, with so much ferocity that he chops clean through Curly’s thigh, femur and all.

Curly wails. Blood pulses out.

“Don't blame me, buddy. We wouldn't be in this mess if you hadn’t-” Jimmy cuts himself off with a grumble.

He reaches over for the first aid kit near Swansea’s plate. A needle, a rapidly depleting spool of thread, and a cauterization device are all that is left inside. The device is similar in shape to a pen, emitting intense heat from the tip when a button on the opposite end is pressed. It's nothing fancy, but that’s to be expected. Pony Express was nothing if not frugal.

Jimmy gets to work sewing up whatever he can and cauterizing the rest. Curly keeps on sputtering and sobbing and screaming while he works. It's nothing like that confident voice that Jimmy was so used to hearing. No more nitpicks whenever Jimmy made a small error, no more rallying speeches, no more comforting affirmations when somebody was down- just agonized retches. He eventually quiets down to a sobbing mess before screaming again as Jimmy pours mouthwash over his leg. Makeshift disinfectant.

“I do all of this for you, and this is the fucking thanks I get,” he mutters under Curly’s anguish.

And it’s not like Jimmy’s stomach doesn't curl at the pilot’s screams, it's not like he's completely unsympathetic, but fuck, was it frustrating to restrain himself from hitting the poor bastard. Curly laying there screaming despite his efforts; a bleeding reminder of his sins- he can’t take it. Jimmy feels an urge to take care of him, to atone for his sins, but he often also feels an urge to strangle him as well. He wants to put Curly out of his misery, but a small part of him says that that was somehow too far. His crew were corpses wearing party hats, but putting Curly out of his misery was too far.

He had to take care of Curly- he couldn't give up. Curly was the one responsibility that Jimmy would not, under any circumstance, let himself fuck up. He’s better than that, he tells himself.

The teal mouthwash stops flowing over the nasty stitches and burns, and Jimmy begins wrapping up his leg with the crusty, disintegrating bandages. It's not good, but it’s all he has.

Curly doesn't stop moaning and groaning out of pain, he even starts to hiccup through his sobs as Jimmy finishes his shoddy first aid efforts.

Jimmy looks to the side, where the good chunk of meat he cut off lies. He grabs it with his bare hand, bloodying it in the process, and sets the meat onto a clean paper plate of its own. He then grabs a set of plastic utensils and places them on opposite sides of the meat. A fork and knife, rendered dull and pointless by Pony Express' aversion to violence on board. First it was making sweetener off-limits, then it was ditching metal utensils for a fear of somebody hurting somebody else.

Look how good that turned out, Jimmy thinks as he picks up the plate and rounds the table to Curly's head.

Curly stares at him with a desperate plea in his eye, breathing out whimper after whimper.

Jimmy stares back with a certain sternness, and sets down the plate next to Curly's head. He picks up the utensils and begins to cut up the chunk of flesh.

The shitty plastic knife carves through sinew as the fork holds the piece still. Tendons split, muscles collapse, and Jimmy has a small morsel in front of him. He doesn't eat first though, oh no. A captain should serve his crew first, not himself. One more restriction atop his mountain of responsibilities. But Jimmy's a good captain, so he abides by it.

He stabs the fork into the small piece of muscle, little prongs poking out the other side. Little drops of blood trail down the utensil as Jimmy guides in to Curly's clamped jaw. He pries it open and helps Curly chew, massaging his torn throat just to get him to swallow. The whole ordeal takes a deal of effort, it takes a few drops of sanity, it takes having to hear a few unbearable sounds, but Jimmy gives it all in stride. He cuts up another piece. He forces it down Curly's throat. Curly gags it up. He forces it down again.

Drool dribbles from the side of Curly's mouth as Jimmy moves his jaw for him, and Jimmy thinks about mama birds feeding their young. It's disgusting, it makes them both gag, but at the end of the day, it's what's best.

He's fed Curly half of the piece now. He sets down the plate and Curly is sobbing. He's sobbing and gagging and groaning and squirming and wincing and drooling and bleeding.

“I don't like this anymore than you do,” Jimmy says solemnly. He looks down at the plate. Captain's turn.

He goes back to his chair, sits down with the plate in front of him, hovers the knife and fork over the meat and suddenly he’s in a chapel for the first time in twenty-odd years.

He’s sitting in the pews. The chapel is empty besides a few faceless priests who wear Pony Express jumpsuits, and the crew who sit in the pews around him. Expanding foam hugs the corners.

The entire room is bathed in red from the window sitting above the lectern. Instead of a portrait of Jesus or Mary or some saint, the stained glass depicts the emergency warning that illuminated the lounge. Splintering cracks run throughout the whole thing, mimicking the pattern that the fire ax had made all those weeks ago. A few green, blue, and purple colored panes represent glitching pixels.

Somebody is on the organ, playing a soft version of the Pony Express jingle. Other than that, it is silent. Priests walk among the pews with little crackers and dixie cups of wine. Communion.

They stop by Swansea, and he grabs the food and drink with a smile. The lines around where his eye used to be crinkle. “Hair of the dog that bit me,” he mutters, and swallows the wine in one gulp.

They stop by Anya, and she takes the food and drink while staring at the floor. “Thanks,” she says quietly, and nibbles at the cracker.

They stop by Daisuke, and he looks uncertain, as if he doesn't know what to do. He takes the items after a moment and asks, “So I just eat this then?”, looking for approval. The priest nods, and he shrugs and eats the cracker. He winces after sipping the wine.

Finally they stop by Jimmy. He holds his trembling hands out, and they place a plastic cap of mouthwash in one and a slice of Curly’s leg in the other.

He stares at them widely before staring back up to the priest, but the priest is suddenly at the lectern. Curly is up there too, laying on a funeral altar.

The priest begins to speak and his voice sounds just like Polle’s. Jimmy almost laughs from the absurdity of it all.

“Then Jesus said unto them, ‘Verily, verily I say unto you, unless ye

eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.' John 6:53," the Polle priest recites from his bible.

Swansea, Anya, and Daisuke say "Amen." Curly moans in pain.

Suddenly Jimmy is back in the Tulpar lounge and all of its dilapidated glory, his bloody hands clasped in prayer.

He drops his hands and looks down. Curly's leg looks back at him. He can feel Curly himself looking at him. He's always looking. Judging. Knowing.

Jimmy picks up the piece of meat (communion cracker) and bites into it, forgoing the use of utensils.

He sinks his teeth in, and the blood flows out of the meat when he chews like juice flowing out of a fruit's pulp. The metallic taste coats his tongue, and his stomach immediately feels queasy. He remembers Anya mentioning once that "Swallowing too much blood at once can make you throw up, fun fact."

Blood and saliva trail down his chin, down his fingers, down his soul as he eats like an animal. Teeth piercing flesh again and again until he can slide it down his throat. The smell of the bodies, of the meat, of his own breath (minty fresh crashing into the warm stench of meat meat meat) makes him want to puke it all up, but he doesn't. He has no other food. He has to resort to this. He's already starving, the numbers on the scale have been plummeting for the past couple months- he needs this.

He grabs the bottle of mouthwash and takes a swig. It burns every little taste bud it touches, but it sort of helps cleanse the rancid taste of leg.

Curly, Swansea, Daisuke, Anya, and Jimmy all sit around the table. The disgusting sounds of Jimmy eating echo through the otherwise quiet lounge.

Jesus, his disciples, and Judas all sit around the table. For even the pariah shares a table with the messiah.

He licks his fingers, he licks the blood of Christ- the blood of Curly- before tearing at the man's flesh once again. Drink this wine, for it is my blood. Eat this bread, for it is my flesh.

He tears apart Curly's holy flesh. Curly, so far above him in every

way, is keeping him alive. Jimmy has no right to do this, he isn't good enough to share a cockpit with the man, much less enjoy the privilege of eating his flesh; but he does so anyways. Does a sinner deserve Jesus' forgiveness? It doesn't matter, because Jesus saves. Jesus saves and forgives no matter what. Curly saved him, he saved them all. Curly will forgive him. Jimmy is absolved, he feels this.

Curly is still moaning in pain and Jimmy has never felt holier. He feels holy and good and disgusting and sinful and if God has seen the shit he's done on this ship then he's surely going to hell.

But he's not going to hell, because Jesus forgives him. He feasts on a sloppy cut of Curly's thigh because he needs to. He hasn't prayed in decades, but as he chokes down a putrid mixture of ethanol and blood he hears Curly groaning next to him and he knows Curly doesn't blame him. Curly has screamed and sobbed and thrashed but he doesn't mean it. Curly forgives him because Curly is a good man and no matter what Jimmy did up until the accident, Jimmy knows that Curly forgives him. And Curly is so sacred and holy and loved and above him and he looks beautiful in the red light and he is bandaged like a martyr and Jimmy reveres him like a sinner reveres the body of Christ.

Jimmy cries softly as he swallows the last bite.

Amen.

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